Quaker Religious Thought

The Quaker Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Howard H. Brinton

COMMENTS

By Lewis Benson, Thomas S. Brown, and Charles F. Thomas

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group

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Persons wishing to have their names added to the Quaker Theological Discussion Group can do so by sending $2.00, and those sympathetic to this endeavor are invited to make contributions to it in any amount. These will be gratefully received. Those on the mailing list receive *Quaker Theological Newsnotes* and announcements, in addition to the two issues of *Quaker Religious Thought* annually.

Additional copies of this and other issues can be obtained from *Quaker Religious Thought*, 379 Yale Station, New Haven, Conn., at the prices listed on the back cover.

Editorial to the Original Edition

Arising out of a concern of several Friends two years ago to make possible continuing discussion of religious issues of interest to Quakers, the Quaker Theological Discussion Group came into existence. In a letter sent to a large number of Friends, the general purpose of this new organization was stated as follows:

> The objective is not to formulate a Quaker creed but to explore more fully the meaning and implications of our Quaker faith and religious experience. This should include both an historical and contemporary approach, and should be concerned with both the content and application of our faith.

The response in the Society of Friends has been encouraging, with well over 100 persons on the mailing list. In the summer of 1958 members of this group were asked to take responsibility for a round table at the Cape May Conference of Friends, and again found a very strong response to questions of religious thought. Believing that one way of meeting such an interest as this is through the pooling of thought on matters of common concern to the Quaker faith, the steering committee of the Discussion Group decided in a meeting held at Kirkridge in the Fall of 1958 to issue a small journal of Quaker religious thought. The first issue was authorized for the Spring of 1959. A second, expected to appear in the Fall of 1959, will carry an article by Maurice Creasey, British Friend, on Quaker understandings of Jesus Christ, and, like the first issue, will include comments by several Friends.

The steering committee of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group includes these Friends: Wilmer A. Cooper, Chairman, Edward A. Manice, Treasurer, Hugh Barbour, Lewis Benson, Thomas S. Brown, Maurice Creasey, T. Canby Jones, J. Calvin Keene, David O. Stanfield, and Charles F. Thomas.

The Quaker Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

HOWARD H. BRINTON

The Society of Friends arose from an immediate, living experience of the Holy Spirit. This was not a new discovery. It was a rediscovery of a truth shared in some degree by all Christians and specially emphasized by many of the reformers in seventeenth century England. Among these reformers the Society of Friends was unique in making its experience of the Spirit primary and all else secondary. As the Spirit of God is in man to inspire and to guide him this Spirit is the source of every sincere religious act and belief. Nothing in human experience, neither holy book, nor holy church, nor holy state can take precedence over the Spirit of God himself. Therefore, the worship of God requires no human leadership, the Divine Spirit being present as leader. A form of church government based on primacy of the Spirit recognizes no final human authority; God's Spirit is the ultimate authority. Vocal ministry in the meeting for worship should be exercised only under the fresh and immediate anointing of the Spirit. Since the Spirit "bloweth where it listeth" there should be no pre-arrangement to trammel its course. Man is not in a position to designate in advance special types of action or appointed speakers, for how can any human being presume to say upon whom the Spirit will call? The Spirit, being of God, has power unlimited to overcome man's sin and render him capable of carrying out divine requirements. Outward sacraments are unessential if the worshipper experiences spiritual baptism and spiritual communion. If he does not experience the inward baptism and communion, outward signs are empty forms. Because the Spirit is present in the hearts of all, it is by an appeal to the Divine Spirit rather than by violence that men are to be won over to the better cause. In these and in other areas of Quaker faith and practice, belief in the presence of God's Spirit or the Light of Christ in man gives meaning to all

other doctrines. "This," says William Penn, "is the root of the goodly tree of doctrines that grew and branched out from it."

Experience of the Divine Spirit was expected by many persons in various sects and groups in England during the early Cromwellian period because this experience was seen to have been the event of first importance in the early Christian movement. The Bible was then for the first time widely read in England. Its impact was enormous. Many longed to say with Paul, "We have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (I Cor. 2:12). The new sects attempted, some conservatively with few changes, some radically with many changes, to adopt a religion closer to that of the New Testament from which the historic Christian Church had obviously departed very far. The Quakers, except for a few small and transitory sects, were the most radical of these groups: the Puritans accused them of reducing religion to pure inwardness and subjectivism.

The first Protestants had eliminated the Church as the means of salvation and source of authority. They substituted the Bible as the final rule. Salvation was to be obtained by response to the Scriptures in faith and trust. How then was the Bible to be interpreted? Protestants and Quakers agreed in maintaining that Holy Writ must be interpreted through the Spirit. Protestantism itself began with a doctrine of dependence on the Spirit and the Quakers could quote the early reformers in defense of their position. But Protestantism soon took a turn directly away from their original position. The continental leaders of the Reformation, and later the English leaders, too, recognized that this doctrine might lead to religious anarchy. If every man or woman, however ignorant and unlearned, who claimed the inspiration of the Spirit, could interpret the Bible in his own way, the result might be complete confusion. Because of this fear of religious liberty amounting to license, Luther crushed the Anabaptists in Germany who had taken literally the doctrine of dependence on the Spirit. In both England and New England, Church and State spared no effort to crush the Quakers. The suffering endured under this persecution helped to secure religious liberty throughout the English-speaking world.

The means by which the Quakers, though positing the supremacy of the Spirit, were able to avoid religious anarchy and confusion is little understood outside the Society of Friends. Historians of Christianity sometimes describe the Friends as extreme individualists. This is a natural but mistaken deduction from the Quaker doctrine that the Spirit takes precedence over Bible and Church. When Quakerism arose there was already a group of religionists in England who based their extreme individualism on the belief that every man is a temple of the Holy Spirit. These people were known as Ranters. Some of their number who joined the Quakers left when a definite form of church government was set up.

The Quakers avoided extreme individualism in two ways. Following the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, they identified the Inward Light with the Logos, the Word of God revealed through the Christ of the New Testament. Since the historic Christ spoke with the same voice as the inward Christ, the outward revelation and the inward reinforced and interpreted each other. If a supposed inward revelation was obviously in disagreement with the outward, it could not be accepted as genuine, but the inward remained primary. It was the essential means of interpreting the written word. The application of the written word to new situations not envisaged in the New Testament was tested by the inward guide. The Old Testament could not be accepted throughout as fully authoritative. It represented a dim twilight before the dawn of the full revelation in Christ.

The second method of avoiding religious anarchy grew out of the experience of the Spirit as inspiring the group, conceived as an organic whole. The revelation of truth to the group took precedence over what an individual might consider to be his own sense of truth. Since the Divine Light of Truth is one and therefore the same in every individual, the closer the members of the group come to the Light, the closer they come to one another. To attain unity in the group a genuine waiting worship and inward searching is prerequisite. This may take considerable time, but decisions on important matters are postponed until unanimity, or at least a fair degree of unanimity, is reached. The individual or the minority who disagrees with most members of

the group has ample opportunity to convince them. This form of church government which places authority in the group as a whole, rather than in any individual, permits the supremacy of the Spirit within the individuals and also assures a fair degree of order and continuity in the Religious Society. There should be enough individualism to permit a wholesome variety of opinion, yet not so much as to cause disorder and confusion. The Society of Friends has been in its healthiest condition when there has been neither too much nor too little uniformity.

Paul's conception of the church as the Body of Christ, an organic whole, "the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23) is the basis of this doctrine. Friends, as well as Paul, also use other terms to suggest the same idea as, for example: "the household of God" becoming "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19, 22). This belief is becoming more prominent in modern Protestantism.

QUAKER NAMES FOR THE DIVINE IN THE HEARTS OF MEN

To designate the Divine Presence in the heart of man, the Friends have used many names, such as Light, Life, Truth, Love, Power, Pure Wisdom, the pure Witness, the Seed, the grace of God, that of God in every man, the Christ Within or Inward Christ, the blood of Christ. These and other terms did not always suggest exactly the same concept though they all refer to some operation or manifestation of the Divine life within the soul of man. God reveals himself in many ways both outwardly and inwardly. Friends being in general neither Trinitarian nor Unitarian, could almost be called Multiplarian if their vague and ambiguous theology could elicit a name.

Some of the words for the Spirit are personal and some impersonal, depending on the type of religious experience to which they apply. When Friends sought guidance, they generally referred simply to "the Spirit," without employing the adjective "Holy" as in the phrase "Holy Spirit." When they spoke of the Christ Within, they tended to think of the process of transformation and salvation. This was primarily the work of the Inward Christ as their own experience convinced them. This does not mean that they ignored the work of the outward Christ which, as history shows, has about it a timeless quality extending to the

present and even beyond it. When they spoke of the "Seed" they thought of the divine in a dual capacity. The Light from God (or Christ) shines upon the divine Seed of the Kingdom planted in every human heart according to the parable. For George Fox, the word "Seed" generally referred to Gen. 3:15 in which God declares enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The seed grows if not too thickly overlaid with the hard earth of sin.

When they referred to the Light it was often thought of as the Light of moral or religious knowledge. When they referred to the Light of Christ, they tended to suggest the doctrine set forth in the first chapter of John's Gospel. The Light "which lighteth every man" is the Word of God through which the world was created. From the beginning this Light has been shining into the darkness (John 1:5). In the whole process of its creative work the culmination of its expression is reached in Jesus, the Word made Flesh.

Friends believed that each man is given the Spirit by measure, some in greater measure than others, but everyone can increase this measure by faithfulness. Some, including George Fox, thought of Christ as having received the Spirit "without measure" (John 3:34). Was not Christ himself guided by the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14, 18)? Modern Friends seldom attempt to be explicit in their Christology, not daring to press the living spiritual event into the confines of a verbal formula. In the early days, when attacked by their opponents as not being Christians, they took refuge in orthodox phrases. But they used words which could apply to the inward as well as the outward, whereas their more "orthodox" opponents were generally focusing upon the outward.

The terms "Christ Within" and "Inward Christ" have a warmer, more personal, quality than the more abstract words such as "Light," or even "Life." The same personal quality is characteristic of the "still small voice" of God. The fact that experience of the Spirit is often a personal encounter, sometimes referred to today as an I-Thou experience, is evident from the Quaker Journals or autobiographies. Yet the more impersonal terms, such as the "authority of Truth," are also frequently used. It is not easy to derive definitions from the passages in which

these names for the Spirit appear. Friends did not aim to construct a systematic theology.

The same indefiniteness and ambiguity appear in the New Testament. Paul, for example, speaks of man as "the temple of God" (I Cor. 3:16), as the temple of the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 6:19), and as the being in whom the Spirit of Christ or the Spirit of God may dwell (Rom. 8:9, 10). Paul is a prophet who presents his intuitions of truth as they come to him, with small effort to work out logical consistency. It is possible in Paul, as in Fox, to find more than one theological position. John, the other great interpreter of Christianity, is perhaps a more profound and consistent thinker, but it is difficult to tell in a given case whether he is speaking of the functions of the Eternal Word or the spoken words of the Word made Flesh. The same ambiguity often appears in Quaker writings. The so-called liberal will stress the Eternal Word and the so-called evangelical may tend to emphasize the Word made Flesh, though both are using the same phrases.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUAKERS AND PROTESTANTS

The sharp controversy between Protestants and Quakers in the 17th century led each side to believe that it represented a form of Christianity in which different basic assumptions are inherent. Some Quaker writers, including especially the greatest Quaker theologian, Robert Barclay, made comparisons among what they considered to be three main forms of Christianity: Catholicism, Protestantism, and Quakerism. Of the many beliefs in which the Quakers differed sharply from the Protestants of their time the following were important:

(1) The Spirit which inspired the prophets and apostles who wrote the Bible still continues to inspire men in the same way, but not to the same degree. The Protestants believed that the Bible was produced by a special dispensation of the Spirit which has not continued to the present.

(2) The Spirit has been given to every man since the beginning of the human race. This Spirit is sufficient for his salvation if he obeys it. Through the coming of Christ there has been a new and greater dispensation of the Spirit

which does away with the older, more formal religion. The Protestants held that God's Spirit before Christ came was a "natural light" which revealed moral truth, but had no redeeming value.

(3) Since the Spirit is in all men, it is in sinners as well as in the righteous. Fox's command "to answer that of God in every man" meant that the evil man could be reached by an appeal to the Light Within, as well as the good man. The Protestants believed that the Spirit dwelt only in the redeemed.

(4) The Spirit, if completely yielded to and obeyed, can enable man to triumph completely over sin. The Protestants believed that victory over sin could not be achieved in this mortal life.

All these Quaker doctrines can be derived from the general principle that the Spirit is primary and all else secondary. The same is true in respect to Quaker attitudes toward religious worship and the sacraments, which were radically different from those practised by Protestants. There were other differences of emphasis. The Protestants stressed the atonement of Christ in Jerusalem as the one essential basis of salvation. The Quakers emphasized the redeeming work of the Christ Within to such an extent that they were frequently, but wrongly, accused of ignoring the sacrifice of the historic Christ. They sought to say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ liveth in me." This was redemption as far as it concerned religious experience, that is, complete union with the Eternal Christ.

We have spoken here mainly of the Protestantism of the seventeenth century. Modern Protestantism has assumed a wide variety of forms, some of which approximate Quakerism. The Methodists, for example, would agree with the Quakers on the possibility of a victory over sin through the power of Divine Grace. Yet many traces of the old differences persist.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The Spirit or Light of Christ or that of God in every man has three main functions: source of Truth, source of Power, and source of Unity. As Truth it sensitizes and illumines conscience

and reason. Through prayer, worship, meditation, and religious reading, each seeking soul endeavors to gain access to the divine source of Truth. Through these exercises conscience and reason become better guides to right faith and practice. As Power, the Spirit enables man to act in accordance with the Truth revealed to him. Persons of small capacity are sometimes enabled to do great things through the Spirit. As the source of Unity the Spirit may so operate in a group worshipping together as to draw its members into a single whole. Then Christ's figure of the branches united through the vine becomes experienced as a reality. In similar fashion men in their dealings with one another may discover "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace." "All Friends," writes George Fox, "mind that which is eternal which gathers your hearts together in the Lord."

If we examine not the writings of Friends made to refute their opponents but their writings to one another, such as the letters of Fox and others and the many Journals or Spiritual Autobiographies, we find little mention of the historical events with which the Christian religion began, but a fervent call to obedience to the Will of God as revealed within, by whatever name this Divine element may be called. Journals of the 17th and 18th centuries are, in general, more theocentric than Christocentric. Descriptions of meetings for worship attended by these travelling ministers occupy large parts of their narrative. The objective in worship, as they describe it, is "to search after God that we might find Him and feel Him." The sermons they preached were not expositions of doctrine but calls to heed "the admonitions of the Spirit." Many of these early ministers had what they called "close work," which means that they felt compelled to admonish their hearers for behavior inconsistent with Quaker principles.

Their faithful, painfully accurate records of religious experience during the middle period of Quakerism are our best clues to the character of the Quaker type of religion in its most mature form. In the early period, during the seventeenth century, the religious excitement of the time, sometimes even bordering on fanaticism, the desperate struggle against persecution which deprived the Society of Friends of most of its leaders, and the inner lack of cohesion in belief and practice characteristic of any new undeveloped movement, produced much that was unrepre-

sentative. In the nineteenth century, outside influences from both rationalistic and evangelical sources also produced extreme positions resulting in tensions and, in America, divisions. But the middle period during the eighteenth century, revealed in such Journals as those of John Churchman, Joshua Evans, Catherine Phillips, Martha Routh, Job Scott, John Woolman, and many others, shows a ripening of Quakerism in lives subordinated to the requirements of the Spirit. While these Journals do not present a clear-cut doctrine of the Holy Spirit and its relation to God or Christ, they do reveal saintly lives guided and permeated by the divine life.

Comments

LEWIS BENSON

Howard Brinton's paper on *The Holy Spirit* touches a wide variety of subjects such as the relation of early Quakerism to the Reformers of the 16th century and to the 17th century Puritans in England and New England. He deals with the relation of Quakerism to Methodism; religious individualism and modern Protestantism; the relation of the Anabaptists to Luther; and the relation of 17th century Quakerism to 18th, 19th, and 20th century Quakerism. In our time when Quaker historiography is in transition, there is a strong temptation to comment on these matters but this would extend these comments beyond the space allotted.

Although the paper is headed, "The Quaker Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," it really describes two doctrines of the Holy Spirit, both of which are represented as belonging to the Quaker faith. The first doctrine is described as understanding the Spirit in terms of "personal encounter." It is an "I-Thou experience." It involves response to "the spoken words of the Word made Flesh." For those who take this approach, terms like "Christ Within" or "Inward Christ" have a warm "personal quality."

The writings of Fox illuminate the master-disciple relationship that belongs to this first approach. Fox taught that the inward teacher is "the spirit and light of Jesus."[1] In his Epistles he exhorts Friends as follows:

> ...hear, obey, and follow him, who is the same today as he was yesterday, and so forever.[2] ...speaking of God and Christ ..., signifies nothing, except they do his will; that is, practise it and be obedient to what he commmands and requires.[3]
>
> ...it is good for everyone to have a sense of the resurrection of Christ, and not seek him below; but seek him above, for

1. George Fox, *Journal*, 1952, p. 20.
2. George Fox, *Works*, Vol. 7, p. 277.
3. George Fox, *Works*, 1831, Vol. 8, p. 122.

he is risen from the dead, and lives, and sits at the right hand of the living God.[4]

To the objection that "since his resurrection and ascension he doth not speak now: — the answer is, that 'as God did speak by his Son in the days of his flesh, so the Son, Christ Jesus, doth now speak by his Spirit'."[5] "To preach Christ within does not deny him at the right hand of God for they that see him within, with Light and Spirit they see him at the right hand of God."[6]

Fox sees the Holy Spirit as a witness for Christ. It is with the help of the Holy Spirit that we relate Christ to Old Testament prophecy[7] and know him to be our Lord.[8] He directed people "to the spirit of God in themselves, which the Lord hath given them a measure of . . . that by the Spirit of God, they might know God, and Christ whom God hath sent . . ."[9], and he claims that "the spirit doth instruct them to know their redeemer and their mediator. . . ."[10]

He testifies that in his own experience " . . . the Father of life drew me to his Son by his spirit"[11] and he exhorts, "Do not quench the Spirit of the Father by which he draws to the Son."[12] "Now what is the means by which God doth draw people to his Son, but by his Holy Spirit. . . . By this Holy Spirit, . . . God doth draw people . . . to Christ . . . the great prophet in his New Covenant. . . . They that do not hear the Son of God, the great Prophet, do not mind the drawing of the Father by his Holy Spirit to his Son; but to them that mind the drawings of the good spirit of the Father to his Son, the Spirit giveth understanding. . . . Then they know that Jesus Christ is the way . . . and that none can come unto God but by and through his Son. . . . They know that Christ is their Mediator . . . and is able to the utmost to save all that come to God by him."[13]

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.
5. *Journal*, 1902, Vol. 2, p. 201.
6. Mss. bound with original Catalogue of G. Fox's Papers, p. 136.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
8. *Journal*, 1902, Vol. 2, p. 272.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
10. Mss. bound with original Annual Catalogue of G. Fox's Papers, p. 37.
11. *Journal*, 1952, p. 11.
12. *Journal*, 1902, Vol. 2, p. 294.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 458-459.

The second doctrine of the Holy Spirit described by Howard Brinton is less personal. It is more theocentric than Christocentric. Here the terms "Eternal Word" and "Inward Christ" are identified with some operation or manifestation of the divine life in the soul of man, by whatever name this divine element may be called. Quakers who incline to this approach prefer abstract and impersonal terms such as "light," "life," and "authority of truth" and tend to avoid the personal "I-Thou" types of expression. In this view Christ, through his spirit-filled life, leads us to the Spirit. He is the supreme example of the spirit-filled man. In him the "culmination" of a "process" is "reached."

Quakerism has appeared and now appears in a wide variety of forms. Nearly all of these various forms are fed by two main streams of religious thought and experience. We might call these two streams the "Hebrew-prophetic-personal" and the "Greek-philosophical-impersonal." By whatever name these are called, they are the two main streams of religious thought and experience in the history of Western man. There has been tension between them ever since the first encounter of Greek and Hebrew religion over two thousand years ago.

Howard Brinton has given us a view of two doctrines of the Holy Spirit as they relate to these two streams. This kind of comparison could be extended to include correspondingly differing conceptions of God, Christ, revelation, ministry, worship, the relation of Quakerism to other religions, and many more that need not be mentioned.

These two doctrines or streams or interpretations have both appeared in Quaker history and our generation has inherited both of them. But until the 20th century the Hellenic stream was to be found as a speculative tendency on the fringe of a body of Quaker thought and experience which was firmly rooted in the prophetic Hebrew-Christian tradition. Today, due to an intensive hellenizing process that has been going on for over seventy years, the relationship of these two streams has been reversed and we Quakers find ourselves in a new and vastly changed situation. We have now become largely uprooted from the soil of prophetic religion. The influence of the Hebrew-Christian tradition has never been weaker among us than it is at present. The dual character of Quaker thought that has developed out of

this situation has produced two communities within the Society of which there is evidence in nearly every local Quaker meeting and nearly every Quaker committee. It becomes increasingly difficult for these communities to communicate with each other as time goes on.

One reason why this situation has developed to its present proportions is that, until very recently, Quaker leadership has been extremely reluctant to recognize it and openly discuss it. A second reason is that the question itself has often been clouded by a basic misunderstanding. The pattern of this misunderstanding may be briefly outlined as follows. It is sometimes argued that these two streams of interpretation are merely two verbalizations of the same spiritual event. According to this theory, one stream tends to emphasize the inwardness of the experience and the other the outwardness of it. They therefore are said to complement each other and to be related to each other like the sides of a door.

The fallacy of this argument is that these two streams of thought, experience, and interpretation do not point to one single event but to two different events. Each has its own conception of inwardness and outwardness. They do not complement each other. They do not blend or harmonize. The most successful attempt to bring them into peaceful coexistence is to be found in the history of the Roman Catholic church. But in this case the result was attained in much the same way that tigers and lions can be forced to cooperate — by the authority of the whip.

Howard Brinton seems to be prepared to accept this duality as a kind of fixed pattern in Quaker life. He attributes our failure to be explicit to our "not daring to press the living spiritual event into the confines of a verbal formula." But we have not one event but two, and it is too late to plead that we remain in the innocence of unreflective experience (even if this were possible) because we have already constructed verbal formulas relating to both events.

This is a new situation in Quaker history and it is a situation that calls for decision. It may be that the Quaker mind of today has become so hellenized that it is incapable of grasping the issues involved in this great question. In that case there will

be no contest and the vision of prophetic Quakerism will cease to be a force in Quaker history. What the future holds we do not know, but it is doubtful that the long hoped-for renewal will come within our reach while this question remains unresolved.

THOMAS S. BROWN

I am grateful to Howard Brinton for his wise and irenic account of the Holy Spirit, especially in early Quakerism. It is interesting to note the steadily increasing number of articles and books by Protestant writers on the central importance of the Spirit in Christian religious life, recalling words of Paul and Calvin and Temple that give the same ringing honor to the Spirit that appears in Fox's writings. It is also interesting to note that "unprogrammed" Quakerism today has tended, I think, to move towards greater dependence upon the Spirit alone: "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." One finds also in the world of the unchurched intellectual a movement to explore the religions of the Spirit, especially Zen Buddhism and the more philosophical forms of Hinduism.

But the pitfalls of all religion are peculiarly acute for those who put primary reliance upon the Spirit, namely, idolatry and spiritual pride. An idol is a false god, is a projection of the self, and if primary attention is given to the Spirit experienced within one's *self*, idolatry is easy, if not inevitable. And furthermore it does not appear to me that the leading of the group is intrinsically more free from the danger of idolatry, for the group too has a self which invites self-worship. One has only to think of the idols which are nailed up in our Meetinghouses, beginning with those whose names are "Pastoral" and "Unprogrammed"!

Credos of the Spirit tend to be less specific in term, less concrete in commitment, less precise of eye and mind. Furthermore, in the present divided world, Friends who are committed to the ministry of reconciliation find in "the Spirit" a bond of language common to all the world. Some, however, in their enthusiasm for unity, have failed to acknowledge that the word "Spirit" may refer to essentially different realities or beings, and have fallen into a kind of universal spiritualism which, in my opinion,

finally destroys the living significance and power of both "religion" and "spirit."

It is the directness, the freedom from intermediaries, that constitutes one of the major appeals of spiritual religion. Yet a person who claims direct, unmediated contact or communication with the living God is making an appalling claim, and it is one which many thinking men and women today regard as idolatrous if not actually blasphemous. If I suggest that two human beings have direct, unmediated communication with each other, I thereby presume an extraordinary identity of nature and experience; and I am, therefore, led to suggest also that such contact between man and God presumes a like identity of nature and experience. This is a position which I find it impossible to accept in the light of experience. Men are not God. It is my observation, however, that the loose use of such phrases as "that of God in every man" and "the immortality of the soul" invites such confusion and contributes to the growth of idolatry.

Granted that such idolatry is innocent, yet innocence of itself is no guarantee against wickedness or destruction, as any study of history will verify, beginning with the innocent practice of human sacrifice in primitive fertility cults and rising to an innocence far more terrible among stern pietistic communities such as the Shakers.

This brings me to the second pitfall, which is spiritual pride. The essence of such pride is that because of some highly desirable virtue, some great religious good, I am closer to God and know more clearly his will than others not so fortunately endowed. Friends' attitude toward the sacraments, creeds, scripture, formal prayer, and "hireling ministers" has sometimes given the impression that Quakers have been granted an unusually direct, unmediated telephone connection with God and hence can almost infallibly inform others of his will. If we feel some hesitation about granting infallibility to the Pope and the Church, shall we claim such idolatrous infallibility for ourselves?

Turning back now to Howard Brinton's article and to his description of the tentative Quaker attitude toward the symbol of the Trinity, I find myself wondering if this does not touch the heart of the weakness of the emphasis on the Spirit alone? Is there not in stepping lightly past this great symbol the danger

either of a "Potherb Religion" or of a religion so pure, so free from symbols, so removed from the concrete, so "spiritual" in fact, that it has no relevance to the life we lead, no life in itself, no blood relationship to history, and so becomes one of the polite accoutrements of gracious, simple living?

The function of a symbol is to remind and to stimulate. The Trinity has been for many Christians a symbol of their experience of the presence of the living God. That men have disagreed about the symbol is perhaps more revealing of the quarrelsome nature of men than of the inadequacy of the symbol. Failure to wrestle with the symbol of the Trinity, failure to be reminded and to be stimulated has, I think, impoverished our religious life.

In reaction against the tumults over doctrine some Friends have abjured the term "Trinity," and some have moved swiftly and intently toward mystical monotheism. But monotheism in this mystical sense is "unthinkable" because it is an abstraction from life and from the concrete experiences of life, the raw material of thought, language, prayer; and so the tendency is either to conceive of God as the famous "faint, oblong blur" or to indulge in what one may call "Potherb Theology." By this latter phrase I mean the tendency to think of God in abstract terms and to introduce nouns to suggest what God is like (or is not like) almost at random until the brew is seasoned to taste. And the next step, because of the Aristotelian mind-set of the times, is to treat, though unconsciously, the various taste-producing ingredients as separate entities, i.e., as gods under God. This is the only way I can understand the use of the phrase "The Inner Light" in some contexts.

But neither such abstraction nor such idolatry is as likely to occur, it seems to me, within the full framework of the symbol of the Trinity, which keeps, as Tillich says, "The unity betwen the ultimacy and the concreteness in the living God."

If Quakerism is to be strong in its heritage from the Spiritual Reformation, it must keep its roots in the Bible, which is a living record of the struggle between God and man, between monotheism and idolatry, between fulfilment and pride, and which is a record from beginning to end of the urgent work of the Holy Spirit in admonishing, redeeming, empowering men in the great work of the Kingdom of God. Here is the record of an

"experimental" relationship with God far older and far more inclusive than anything in the brief life of Quakerism. Yet more important than mere age is the strong bond of human kinship we feel with those men and women who live in our concrete, historical world, rising to meet specific religious and ethical problems in ways that wring from us both our admiration and our assent.

The dangers to religious life in Fox's time were rigidity of form and fanaticism of spirit: in our day they are vagueness and flaccidity. The very forts which he stormed may well prove to be the ramparts from which we shall have to defend the great truth of Quaker experience that "Christ has come to teach His people Himself."

CHARLES F. THOMAS

Howard Brinton has shown effectively how the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the "root of the tree" of Quaker faith and practice. It is encouraging to see the interest Friends are showing in the subject, and though we may not be able to systematize the experience of the Spirit into doctrine, discussing it is highly desirable. A doctrine of the Spirit can be a means of keeping Friends at the heart of religious experience as personal and group encounter with God. It could conceivably be a unifying force within the Society, because it unites us at a deeper level, one where we have not been too seriously divided.

There are two points at which our consideration of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit ought to give guidance to Friends. One is in helping our generation to give a rationale to the nature of personal encounter with God as Personal Reality, which involves a clear doctrine of man. We have mixed our metaphor in such a way as to confuse many people regarding encounter with God. By emphasis upon the Spirit it should be possible to clear the air. Let us hope in the second place that it will bring together a personal religious vitality with a courageous practice of the social testimonies, a reunion which is much needed. Surely it was direct encounter with God that produced this unity in the experience of early Friends.

It appears to be a reasonable generalization that neither the so-called evangelical Friends nor those who would not so designate themselves have really worked out their faith from the central doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is particularly evident when we begin to talk about what makes a religion spiritual. Ideas seem to range all the way from mere enthusiasm to the highest functions of human reason. A doctrine of the Holy Spirit should give us God in his creative initiative and Self-disclosure as the heart of spiritual experience. Intimacy and potency are the most descriptive of the results of the Holy Spirit.

Howard Brinton has given us an inclusive survey of the doctrines and practices affected by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Now let us become more explicit in the implications of the Spirit in formulating our doctrines of God, man, sin, Christ, the church, and the world. We have tended to work from the traditional experiences of Friends to our doctrines. Can we now assume that these experiences, supported by our own experience, give us the basic evidence that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is central, and from that doctrine interpret these others in fresh language? Granted that early Friends were ambiguous in their doctrines and used multiple expressions and analogies, this only increases the need for a restatement today.

While I find myself in genuine unity with the interpretation which Howard Brinton has given, some of the references made with regard to church government, manner of worship, and the nature of ministry are not fully satisfying. In the first place these are in areas of practice more than they are in the areas of doctrine. They will vary according to situations and background. They will be varied even as the leading of the Spirit is unpredictable. The same importance cannot be attached to the practice of these matters as to the doctrines mentioned earlier. I think we would be put to it to try to prove our faith by these practices.

For example, Friends have not convincingly demonstrated much success at avoiding religious anarchy and confusion. If we had to prove our doctrine of the Spirit by the way we have handled church government the outlook would be disquieting. It is true to say that individualism is controlled by group precedence, but by group we usually mean our Monthly Meeting.

Meetings tend to resist any such authority being in larger organized groups of Friends, such as the Quarterly Meeting, Yearly Meeting, Five Years Meeting or General Conference, and the World Committee. The individualism of a Meeting can be a source of anarchy as well as a person can be. How far up the scale does the idea of control by the inspired group go? What Yearly Meeting has a way to deal with local Meetings which it feels are out of line? It is true that most Disciplines provide for a genuine discipline of subordinate meetings, but we fail to use it because of general resistance to any superior body of Friends.

The relation of the Spirit to ministry is another area in which we have difficulty. What, for instance, do we mean when as Friends we say the "worship of God requires no human leadership"? As far as individual worship is concerned, such a statement appears obvious enough, but can it apply to group worship without qualification? Participation in group worship through a vocal act is a form of leadership whoever the participant may be. Participation in group worship in a vocal way is a priestly or prophetic function, and is to be done under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to be sure. But only in a worship without any vocal expression could it truly be said that there is no human leadership.

Another ambiguity arises in the not uncommon statement that "man is not in a position to designate in advance the types of action or appointed speakers" if worship is to be under the direction of the Spirit. The implication is that there can be only one condition, time, and place suitable for the "call" of the Spirit. That is the present moment and in the gathered meeting for worship. Rather than liberating the Spirit this might be a dictation to the Spirit. His direction is neither limited to the hour of group worship, nor to forms and appointments. There could be, and surely are, times when the group should invite leadership and appoint acts of worship simply because the Spirit directs them in such action.

When is the vocal ministry "under the fresh and immediate anointing of the Spirit"? Is it a matter of time or of fact? Is what the Spirit inspires on Wednesday fresh for Wednesday and unfresh on Sunday? We have to be guarded in implying that the Spirit can or will inspire ministry for a worshipping group

only on the scene and at the hour of worship. The Spirit is not so limited. Some early Friends were under the urgings of the Spirit for months before they could bring themselves to speak in meeting.

The Spirit is a gift of God to those who respond to him. It is the gift of himself. It is not a likeness of God in man, but the visit of God to man. The gift is for personal salvation through the light of truth, judgment, love and comfort, or companionship. The Spirit is given to groups for the same purposes. It is a gift for the building up of the "body of Christ." The gifts are varied as to the nature of ministry in the group, and the law governing their use is the law of love.

Response to Comments

HOWARD H. BRINTON

Lewis Benson has well stated the contrast between the Hebraic-prophetic-personal and the Hellenic-philosophical-impersonal tendencies in modern Quaker thought. He feels that it is not a case of both-and but a case of either-or, since in his opinion it is impossible to combine the two. In basing his religion on a personal relationship with God and Christ, he places himself in line with much of recent theological opinion.

I agree that, under the influence of a liberal theology which is over-influenced by scientific methods, modern Quakerism has often swung too far toward the impersonal. But, perhaps because of my philosophical and scientific training, I cannot abandon entirely the more general and universal approach. Both the impersonal Greek and the personal Hebrew points of view were present in Quakerism, as indeed they were in Christianity, almost from the beginning. I say "almost" for in both cases it is probable that the personal came first, as it should, for that is the more powerful and moving of the two ways.

I shall not dispute Lewis Benson's interpretation of George Fox. But soon after Fox came Barclay and Penn who added a more universal and generalized element which was not renounced by Fox. In a similar way, perhaps, soon after the very personal description of Christ in the Synoptic gospels, came John who added an emphasis on the Eternal Light, Life, Logos, Truth, without depreciating the historical events.

In my religion I find a need for both the eternal and temporal, the universal and particular. But such terms as "abstract" or "impersonal" or "it," as contrasted with the personal term "Thou," are inadequate in describing the non-temporal and universal quality of Divinity. We need some such word as "superpersonal," though that is not fully satisfactory either.

Lewis Benson's quotations from Fox seem to make the divine-human relationship too complicated. According to these

statements, God's Spirit draws us to Christ, the mediator between man and God. But Fox is often more direct. A common type of expression in his Epistles is "submit to that which is of God in you to guide you to God" (Ep. 79). Fox is sometimes Christocentric and sometimes theocentric.

Thomas Brown points out the dangers inherent in a religion based only on the Spirit within. I agree that this danger exists. In my essay I pointed out some ways which Friends have used to avoid it. But in spite of these ways, Quakerism has sometimes degenerated into Ranterism in modern, as well as earlier, times. It is true that what we consider to be the Spirit of God or Christ is sometimes a projection of ourselves and that our doctrine of divine guidance may generate spiritual pride. But this, I believe, is not inevitable It only occurs when in our religion the inward becomes everything and the outward nothing. I think that the Friends Journals show that a religion based on the primacy of the Spirit (but not *only* on the Spirit) can be appropriately embodied in a life. The Quaker journalists depended greatly upon the Scriptures. Their sermons often consisted mainly of scriptural quotations. But they believed in the primacy of the Inward Light. The Scriptures, for the very reason that they were produced by the same Light, were an indispensable help.

The doctrine of infallibility, sometimes evident in early Quakerism, has seldom appeared since. But is not the confidence which can say "Thus saith the Lord" an assurance of which we have need today?

In reference to what Thomas Brown says about the importance of the symbol of the Trinity, I agree with his quotation from Paul Tillich that the doctrine of the Trinity keeps "the unity between the ultimacy and the concreteness in the living God," but these are two, not three. Friends also seem sometimes to reduce the three to two in identifying the Holy Spirit with the Christ Within. Though the Trinity is a time-honored and suggestive symbol, I do not wish to limit God to two, three, or any other number of ways of presenting himself to man.

Charles Thomas points out clearly the importance of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a "unifying force within the Society," a doctrine which "would give us God in his creative initiative

and Self-disclosure as the heart of spiritual experience." With this I fully agree, especially as such words do not require us to be specific regarding the exact relation between God, Christ, the Spirit, and man. The Spirit is not an object to be classified, but a Power to which (or to whom) we may, or may not, respond.

Charles Thomas' paper is concerned more with practice than with doctrine. I agree that, as an individual should check the validity of his own inspiration with that of the meeting, the meeting should also check its revelation with that of a larger body. In the Five Years Meeting the larger body has sometimes used its authority to enforce creedal conformity in ministers, a procedure which might have unfortunate results.

On the subject of vocal ministry some misunderstanding may exist. I believe that the Society of Friends needs a teaching ministry at stated times and prepared in advance. As a teacher of religious subjects for thirty years I cannot object to this, though the "weighty Friends" of the meeting which I attended in my boyhood would have condemned this instruction as "creaturely activity" in an area in which only divine inspiration should operate. Paul listed teaching among the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:28). In my opinion, prepared addresses are most suitably given at a time other than a meeting for worship, perhaps at a forum before or after a meeting. It is my belief that the period of collective worship should be devoted to cultivating sensitivity to the "inward intimations" of the Spirit by, and through, which divine guidance may be experienced. What is presented vocally may have had its origin at an earlier time, but in worship it should arise with a fresh sense of fitness and timeliness.

A Quaker meeting is a group search for Truth and a seedbed in which former individual insights may mature and develop. Such a group exercise of worship is a peculiar and difficult undertaking which may fail more often than it succeeds, but three centuries of Quaker practice have proved its power and worth.

Contributors

Howard Brinton before his retirement was for many years a director of Pendle Hill. He and his wife Anna Brinton are well known in Quaker circles. He now spends his time in writing and lecturing. Concerning this article, he writes, "When the Church Unity Committee of the Friends General Conference decided to put out a pamphlet on the Holy Spirit, Alexander Purdy, Preston Roberts and I were asked to write separate and independent essays. This was done. Later it was decided that, even though these essays were unofficial expressions of individual opinion, the General Conference could not deal with theological beliefs. I am glad that *Quaker Religious Thought,* being free from all official ties, is presenting my exposition for criticism. Discussion is the laboratory of theology."

Lewis Benson, Germantown Friend, is probably best known among Friends as editor of *The Call* and author of the pamphlet entitled *Prophetic Quakerism.* His area of special interest, in which he is an expert, is the writings of George Fox and the early period of Quakerism.

Thomas S. Brown, formerly professor of religion in Earlham College and a master in Westtown School, is the newly-appointed principal of Barnesville Friends Boarding School.

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